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Summary record of the 8th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 13 October 2005, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Aliyev ..... (Azerbaijan)
later: Mr. Gujadhur (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Mauritius)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 33: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/60/21 and A/60/173)

1. **Mr. Al-Hebsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the role of the modern media in the service of peace and global development had never been more important, especially since Internet and satellite communications had created a widening civilizational gap between developed and developing countries. The United Arab Emirates was troubled by deliberate distortions by irresponsible Western media institutions of the beliefs and civilization of peoples of developing countries and called for an international code of ethics that would ensure transparent transmission of truthful information, guarantee respect for religious beliefs and cultural diversity, shun racial and ethnic chauvinism and discrimination, and protect the media in conflict zones.

2. In the wake of the recommendations of the Millennium Summit and the outcome document of the 2005 World Summit, it was vital for the United Nations system to enhance the use of communications in its work. While the United Arab Emirates welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information in recent years to publicize the cause of the Organization, it called for the mobilization of more resources to bring the United Nations Arabic radio, television and Internet services up to the same standard as those for the other official languages. His country stressed the need for more awareness programmes in local languages, and was systematically employing the latest technology to familiarize its society with other cultures, while preserving its traditional heritage and the principles of Islam. His Government had concluded a number of bilateral media and cultural agreements with United Nations institutions, participated in international and regional media conferences, and stepped up its involvement in global development projects, including those offering assistance to developing countries and countries afflicted by war and natural disasters. It called for the enhancement of the Department's activities, especially with regard to raising awareness of Palestinian suffering under Israel's policy of aggression, murder, blockades and settlement-building.

3. **Mr. Trepelkov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation supported the steps taken by the Department of Public Information to implement the new strategic goals, structural reforms and functional priorities, and believed that the establishment of a culture of communication should continue to be a key element in enhancing the efficiency of the entire United Nations system. At the same time, it deemed it necessary, once again, to draw the Department's attention to the need to continue to focus its efforts on the dissemination of information that was genuinely important and strategic for the United Nations in the light of the decisions taken at the 2005 World Summit.

4. The Russian Federation believed that Security Council resolution 1624 (2005) would place a serious barrier in the way of those who tried to use the media to incite and justify terrorism. In addition, it commended the Department for the success of the "Unlearning Intolerance" seminars, for its work in elaborating the draft communications strategy to fight terrorism, and for its broad support for the new Executive Directorate of the Counter-Terrorism Committee.

5. His Government supported the renewed plan to rationalize the United Nations information centres, and in that regard, noted the steady and efficient work of United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) Moscow — which played a coordinating role in the outreach activities of United Nations agencies, and supported the enhancement of its regional role as the rationalization process continued. In that context, in response to a request from the Department, the issue of exempting UNIC Moscow from the costs of rent and services was being considered in conjunction with the problem of finding a location for the United Nations country office in Moscow.

6. His Government commended the Department's work to improve and streamline United Nations libraries and to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of the Organization's library services, and welcomed efforts to improve the UN Chronicle. It supported the Department's commitment to the principle of multilingualism and equality of official languages and the delivery of equal information services, both in quantity and quality, for Member States, as well as efforts to ensure language parity on the website, in the News Service, and in the international radio broadcasting service. In that regard, it noted that the Russian version of the website and the News Service were becoming increasingly popular with Russian-speaking users, and was of the view that

the Russian-language radio programme, "60 Years in 60 Minutes" would contribute to that trend. It expressed appreciation for the Department's assistance in organizing and conducting joint activities to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and that of the United Nations.

7. **Mr. Zarkashi** (Malaysia) said that his delegation was confident that the reform of the Department of Public Information would enhance its performance and was pleased that the Department had focused its campaign on current and relevant issues. At a time when the effectiveness of the Organization was being called into question, it was important for its activities and achievements to be widely publicized. Malaysia commended the Department for the translation of the executive summary of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2000) into many languages, including Bahasa Malaysia. It also believed that the United Nations information centres played an important role in reaching out to the international community.

8. His Government was grateful to the Department for continuing its news activities in Africa, in particular its support of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and welcomed its efforts to enhance United Nations activities in support of sustainable development in Africa. It believed, however, that an action-oriented strategy was required, in order to ensure United Nations involvement, on a continuing basis, in a joint international effort to assist Africa in resolving its problems. Malaysia supported the use of clear, simple and consistent messages to help ordinary African people to understand their role and responsibility in national development, and the formulation of a single United Nations communications strategy for NEPAD, with the participation of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa.

9. Malaysia congratulated the Department on its work in organizing the 13th International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, and urged it to continue to highlight issues related to Palestine until such time as a peaceful settlement of the conflict could be achieved. The steps taken by the Department to improve the image of the Organization among the peoples of the Middle East were encouraging; Malaysia welcomed the development of a strategic communications framework in that region.

10. His Government encouraged the Department to continue to cooperate with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in the development of a global communications strategy to raise awareness about the new realities it faced; and to continue to support the dissemination of information about dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace. Malaysia was in favour of multilingualism, especially on the website; in its view, wider outreach could be achieved only through an equitable use of all six of the official languages.

11. **Mr. Baja** (Philippines) said that the role of the Department in promoting a positive image of the United Nations was indispensable; in that regard, the previous year had been a challenging one. The controversies surrounding the Oil-for-Food Programme and the allegations of sexual abuse involving peacekeepers had unfortunately received more prominent media coverage than the Department's efforts to project a positive image of the work of the United Nations. The Department had nonetheless risen to the challenge, and had brought the message of the Organization to as many people as possible, within the limits of available resources. The Philippines commended the Department, in particular, for its handling of the aftermath of the tsunami in South and South-East Asia in 2004, for its promotion of United Nations initiatives, in particular the Millennium Project, for publicizing the 2005 World Summit and the third summit meeting of the Security Council, and for its assistance to the Philippine-initiated Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace.

12. The Philippines welcomed the Department's reorientation process, and approved of the client-oriented approach as well as the system-wide coordination of public information activities. The Department's expanded linkages with media and non-governmental organizations and its enhanced use of new information and communication technologies should allow it to reach a much larger audience and respond more effectively to modern challenges. His Government supported the enhancement of public information capacities with a view to promoting a better understanding of the work of the United Nations, around the world, and supported expanded cooperation with other substantive United Nations organs, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs.

13. In view of the outcry against allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations, as well as other negative publicity, the Philippines, as the largest troop-contributing country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), urged the Department of Public Information and the information components of the various missions to speak with one voice and immediately and effectively address any issues or concerns. A quick response mechanism should be complemented by an information drive to provide host Governments and their peoples with a better understanding of the role of the United Nations in their countries.

14. The Department should pay special attention to the needs and requirements of developing nations in the field of information and communications technologies. Traditional media as well as radio and television stations should all be encouraged to tell the United Nations story, using native languages. The Philippines supported calls for the allocation of additional resources for the United Nations information centres, especially in the least developed and developing countries of Asia and Africa. The Department should continue to work with Member States to help promote a better understanding of the Organization in their countries, and to expand linkages with educational institutions.

15. **Ms. Poon** (Singapore) said that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guaranteed the right to freedom of opinion and expression, which included the right to seek and receive information. The Department of Public Information had shown an unwavering commitment to its duty of empowering communities with information, and had displayed creativity in harnessing new technologies and in working with other organizations to make the most of their capabilities and resources. It faced several challenges, however. It was competing for space with a plethora of information services, which were particularly difficult for a small nation like Singapore to negotiate; unfortunately, the information gap was widening between rich and poor countries. In that context, she was pleased to note that the Department had not abandoned more traditional means of communication such as radio and television, and was targeting audiences and tailoring messages to their needs. The Department should also provide support to civil society partners with a view to better disseminating the United Nations message.

16. It was essential to avoid sensationalism and bias. The United Nations message should be clear, timely and accurate. Credibility was vital, as the ability to filter information was becoming as important than the ability to transmit it. The image and credibility of the United Nations was not the sole purview of the Department of Public Information, however, but was the shared responsibility of all persons who worked for the United Nations, and of Member States. In that regard, Singapore approved of the creation of an Ethics Office to encourage financial transparency and avert misconduct, with a view to boosting the integrity standards of the United Nations. Credibility was non-negotiable; and clear accountability was essential. It was also important to steer the attention of the world towards the work that the vast majority of United Nations workers and volunteers were painstakingly carrying out. A good information strategy should focus on what the United Nations wanted to do for the world, and should avoid peripheral and short-term issues. Singapore was confident that the Department would rise to those challenges.

17. *Mr. Gujadhur (Mauritius), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

18. **Ms. Miller** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reaffirmed the vital role of the Department of Public Information in promoting a positive image of the United Nations through the provision of information on the Organization's activities. She welcomed the completion of the reform and reorientation of the Department and the ongoing efforts to integrate new information and communications technologies at all levels, which should help improve efficiency and effectiveness. However, since many of the target audiences in developing countries did not have access to the most up-to-date technology, the Department should continue to maintain its use of traditional methods of communication, including radio and print media.

19. She commended the Department for its work on the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations, in which the United Nations information centres, especially those in developing countries, had played an important role. The Department should also maintain its focus on the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, the question of Palestine, decolonization, dialogue among civilizations and the special needs of Africa. Implementation of the outcomes of the major United

Nations summits and conferences was another area deserving special attention. In addition, the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in November 2005, should be effectively promoted. Welcoming the launch of UNIFEED, she said that increased resources should be allocated to it, as it helped to publicize the accomplishments of many United Nations agencies which otherwise often went unnoticed by the world's media.

20. With regard to the proposals for rationalization of the United Nations information centres, it should be borne in mind that the centres in developing countries played a crucial role in promoting the public image of the Organization. They should therefore be assisted in strengthening their impact, including through strategic communications support if necessary. The Group of 77 and China hoped that additional resources would be found to hold workshops in all regions for the staff of the centres. Any rationalization should have the sole purpose of improving efficiency and effectiveness and should not result in closures of centres. Moreover, the views of the host country of a given centre should be taken into account in the consideration of proposals for that centre, including with regard to evaluating its effectiveness.

21. The Group of 77 and China supported the efforts of the Department to enhance the United Nations website in all official languages. The Department should continue to strive for parity among official languages. It was also important to strengthen the Department's public information capacity in the field of peacekeeping. To that end, collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations should be continued.

22. The role of the Department as the public voice of the Organization should be further consolidated in the ongoing process of reform. In particular, continued efforts were needed to counter negative publicity and to correct distorted or biased reports of corruption or ineffectiveness. It should also be mentioned that, especially in relation to controversial aspects of the reform process, the Secretariat should maintain political impartiality and avoid imparting negative perceptions of positions taken by Member States in the negotiating process. A balanced approach that recognized the rights and interests of all Member States in accordance with the principle of the sovereign equality of States was clearly required.

23. **Ms. Yan** Jarong (China) said that her delegation appreciated the services provided by the Department of Public Information during the 2005 World Summit. The Department should now focus on publicizing the World Summit Outcome and accelerating its implementation, giving top priority to meeting the special needs of developing countries, particularly those in Africa. The Department played a vital role in publicizing the objectives of the United Nations and promoting a positive image of the Organization. Following the completion of the reorientation process, her delegation looked forward to the Department becoming a more powerful public voice for the United Nations.

24. She welcomed the articles by the Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information that had been published in a number of prominent newspapers and magazines with a view to clarifying the Organization's position on certain issues. The Secretariat should build on that approach, using the most effective means to communicate United Nations news. Closer links with non-governmental organizations and with the public and private sectors were also a good way of spreading information. The briefings and other activities held for non-governmental organizations were welcome, but many non-governmental organizations from developing countries had been unable to participate owing to a lack of funds. It was therefore to be hoped that other means such as mailings and the Internet would be used to strengthen communications with them.

25. United Nations Radio and the Organization's website were important sources of information, and their multilingual capacity should be reinforced. It was to be hoped that sufficient resources would be allocated so as to achieve parity among all official languages.

26. The United Nations information centres around the world had been instrumental in communicating the Organization's message and mobilizing public support for its activities. Her delegation hoped to see them become more influential and effective. With regard to rationalization of the centres, more consultations should be conducted with the relevant Member States, taking into account the specific conditions of different regions.

27. China was highly appreciative of the United Nations role in world affairs, a fact demonstrated by

the presence of the President of China, Hu Jintao, at the 2005 World Summit. Her Government, together with Chinese non-governmental organizations and media, had organized a number of activities to celebrate the Organization's sixtieth anniversary. Chinese people were increasingly aware that, in the face of numerous global threats and challenges, both China and the world needed the United Nations. She particularly thanked the Department for its assistance with the China-United Nations Photo Exhibition and welcomed the production of special sixtieth anniversary programmes by United Nations Radio in collaboration with Chinese media partners. The essay competition "The United Nations in my eyes" had also been a successful joint venture. China looked forward to further strengthening its links with the United Nations and the Department in the future so as to continue to enhance the positive public perception of the Organization.

28. **Mr. Ali Ahmad** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his Government was anxious that the new world information order should reflect the United Nations values of equality, justice and mutual respect. The primary task of the Department of Public Information was to serve as the voice of the Organization on issues on which United Nations bodies had issued resolutions, especially foreign occupation, poverty and disease. His delegation feared that the strengthening of communications partnerships with non-governmental organizations and the private sector might be employed for the benefit of outside media parties who would not necessarily be impartial in conveying the voice of the United Nations.

29. His Government was in the process of drafting a new law to support communications workers that affirmed freedom of information in a way that conformed to Syrian culture. It welcomed the thirteenth annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East and hoped that the Department of Public Information would continue to organize more such activities, and especially implement the special information programme on Palestine, in view of the tragic consequences the Palestinians were suffering from Israeli occupation.

30. His delegation welcomed the Department's efforts to enhance the United Nations website and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, but noted that the Arabic website was in need of greater allocation of resources and personnel to deal with the special problems posed by Arabic script and, in that regard, asked what steps had been taken to implement General Assembly resolution 59/277. His delegation stressed the need to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing nations. It also hoped that the Department would enhance awareness of the role of the Committee, in particular its decolonization efforts, and would make clear to those who complained that all that the Committee did was re-adopt the same resolutions every year that the way to put an end to the re-adoption of resolutions was to implement them.

31. **Mr. Adel** (Egypt) said that his delegation had participated in formulating the draft resolution on the issue under consideration because of its belief that United Nations media services needed to be brought up to date. Greater balance among the six official languages would bring peoples together, increase dialogue between civilizations, and enhance the Organization's ability to achieve peace and national reconciliation in post-conflict countries. He thanked the Department of Public Information for organizing the thirteenth annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East and expressed the hope that the Department would continue raising awareness of the requirements for peace in the Middle East through media messages that supported legitimate demands for the end of the occupation. It should also develop a strategy that reflected the outcomes of the 2005 World Summit.

32. On the question of the United Nations information centres, his delegation believed that the immediate task was to make maximum use of the limited resources currently available, and to use technological advances to connect the centres with each other and ensure rapid provision of easily accessible information. His Government looked forward to greater contributions by the Department of Public Information to dialogue between civilizations, a culture of peace, eliminating the confusion between terrorism and the legitimate struggle of peoples under occupation, narrowing the digital divide between north and south, confronting the challenges of development, and creating a climate of public opinion favourable to United Nations reform.

33. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the modern world faced many problems and challenges of which the public needed to be made aware. The Department of Public Information played a crucial role in providing such information in an impartial and

unbiased manner, particularly given the power of the mass media to shape public opinion in a globalized world. His delegation commended the Department's activities in the past year, including the promotion of the 2005 World Summit, and encouraged the Department to maintain its focus on areas of specific interest to developing countries. The Department should be strengthened and given the necessary tools so that it could continue to project a positive image of the United Nations.

34. In that context, it was also necessary to strengthen the United Nations information centres around the world. Reducing the number of centres in developing regions would only weaken the voice of the Organization. His delegation was therefore pleased to note that the Secretary-General was now proposing to rationalize the network of centres rather than create regional hubs on the basis of the Western European model.

35. His delegation encouraged the Department to build on the process of reform and reorientation by incorporating evaluation in its future activities and reviewing the quality of its products and services on a regular basis. The United Nations information centres should be included in the evaluation process, with particular attention paid to the views of the host countries, so as to enhance the centres' efficiency and effectiveness. Welcoming the seminars organized by the Department on dialogue among civilizations and cultures, he encouraged the Secretary-General to continue to make such dialogue a high priority. The United Nations information centres could be further utilized to promote dialogue among civilizations and, to that end, should be provided with modern communication technology and adequate financial resources.

36. **Ms. Holguín** (Colombia) said that her Government attached great importance to the activities of the United Nations Information Centre in Colombia; it provided 81 per cent of the annual budget of the Information Centre which had the largest United Nations presence in Latin America. Her Government took the view that information about a country and its region should be generated within that country or region. It therefore made sense for the Information Centre to remain in Colombia.

37. Colombia opposed the process of regionalization, which had not produced the desired results, and favoured a more gradual approach. Rationalization meant improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the information centres and of the activities of the Department in general. The closure or transfer of centres would not serve that purpose. Any proposals for change in that regard should be agreed upon in consultation with Member States and, in the implementation phase, with individual host countries.

38. Her delegation welcomed the completion of the reform process in the Department of Public Information. Colombia had recently presented a sixtieth birthday gift to the United Nations in the form of the "Carnaval de Barranquilla", proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The support of the Department in staging the event at United Nations Headquarters was greatly appreciated.

39. **Mr. Choi** (Republic of Korea) said that at a time when the United Nations needed to enhance its visibility in the international community and among ordinary citizens the world over, the Department of Public Information had an essential role to play, and was to be commended for enhancing public information by adopting a client-based approach. The Republic of Korea welcomed the significant improvements that had been made to the United Nations website through the use of the latest technology. The site had become one of the most significant sources of public information on the United Nations, and it was to the credit of the Department that the number of people using it had continued to increase. The Department had played an active role in drawing attention to the United Nations reform process and the 2005 World Summit, and should now focus attention on the implementation of the World Summit Outcome.

40. In the key area of outreach, the Department needed to enhance its information dissemination towards countries that did not use any of the official United Nations languages. Some of those countries were those that supported the United Nations most strongly, or that were most in need of United Nations operations, and their citizens must not be excluded from the global conversation because they spoke a different language. The Department's work in publicizing the Secretary-General's report "In larger freedom", including translating the executive summary into numerous languages beyond the official six, was

both a step in the right direction and a sign of how much remained to be done. The valuable work of United Nations information centres in providing localized web content should also be enhanced. The Republic of Korea also welcomed the reform effort of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library community and commended the progress made so far.

41. At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders had made their view abundantly clear that the United Nations system as a whole needed greatly increased evaluation and oversight. It was thus encouraging that the Department was succeeding in meeting the demands of an average of 80 per cent of its target audiences in terms of usefulness, relevance and quality. The culture of evaluation should be encouraged and periodically renewed.

42. **Ms. Baaziz** (Algeria) said that while the transmission of knowledge in the developed countries had facilitated progress, that progress was not shared with the countries of the South, with the disparities in access to new information technologies constituting an obstacle to the latter's development. It was clear that reducing those imbalances had to be part and parcel of a major international thrust to reach the Millennium Development Goals and contribute to reducing poverty and improving living conditions. The United Nations, and particularly the Department of Public Information, must work to ensure all countries equitable access to the benefits of information technologies, in order to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries. Algeria hoped that the World Summit on the Information Society would be a true expression of digital solidarity that would provide an opportunity to meet the challenges of new information technologies and distribute their advantages, in the service of the Millennium Declaration.

43. Welcoming the work carried out by the Department of Public Information to publicize important economic, social, environmental and health issues, as well as a number of the Organization's political and security initiatives, she commended the effort that it had invested to face up to the campaign of hostility to which the United Nations had been exposed.

44. Respect for diversity in means of expression and multilingualism, within the United Nations system, remained a matter of concern for many Member States. She repeated her delegation's call for fair and balanced treatment of the six official languages in the services offered by the United Nations on the web as well as with respect to documentation and reference material. Stressing the great importance that her country attached to the United Nations information centres, which played a very special role, particularly in the developing countries lacking technological resources, she appealed for adequate funding and staffing for them.

45. **Mr. Hasan** (Sudan) said that the Committee on Information needed to address the necessity of developing a modern communications system that enhanced international peace and coexistence based on transparency and the free flow of information. One could not speak of the Millennium Development Goals in isolation from the pivotal role of information, which was a cornerstone of sustainable development, democracy, political participation, good governance, human rights, and particularly freedom of the press. The digital divide and the gap in information and communications technology between the developing and developed countries had left too many people in the dark. His Government was therefore gratified that public information and communications had been placed at the heart of the reform of the United Nations. As a country that had just emerged at the beginning of the year from one of the longest lasting conflicts in Africa, Sudan was particularly appreciative of the role that the United Nations information centres played in fostering peace in post-conflict situations.

46. **Mr. Suhail** (Pakistan) said that the task of the Department of Public Information was of vital significance for Member States. The resurgence of interest in the work of the United Nations could only be maximized by an effective performance by the Department, since the public at large had to be kept informed of and involved in the Organization's activities.

47. There was little doubt that there were vast disparities and imbalances in the flow of information between countries and regions, and most pertinently between the developed and the developing worlds. More than ever before, it was imperative to strengthen the information and communication infrastructure of the developing world, which was badly handicapped due to scarce resources and lack of training in modern technology. Unable adequately to disseminate information to the rest of the world, the developing world was overwhelmed by the formidable media of

the developed world which dominated the flow of information, making it lopsided and unidirectional, and undermining understanding and goodwill between societies, regions and cultures. Information and communication must be put to use primarily for the sake of bringing regions and religions closer to each other. The UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication could assist in achieving that objective; the General Assembly should call for a report from UNESCO so that Member States could learn what was being done in that regard.

48. The report of the Committee on Information clearly emphasized the importance of the network of United Nations information centres in enhancing the public image of the United Nations, especially in developing countries. His delegation was therefore pleased that the idea of creating regional hubs was no longer being considered. His Government attached considerable importance to traditional means of communication such as radio. United Nations broadcasts in Urdu, for example, served a useful purpose in disseminating information about the Organization to local people.

49. Stressing the importance of the role of the Department of Public Information in disseminating information about United Nations peacekeeping operations and strengthening dialogue among civilizations and the cultures of peace, he urged the Department also to cover the achievements of Member States with regard to the Millennium Development Goals and initiatives to bring religions and cultures closer to each other.

50. It was to be hoped that the Outreach Division could improve its service to ensure timely dispatch of its publications. He also urged the Department to ensure equitable representation of journalists from developing countries, not only in gaining access to the Secretary-General for interviews, but also in their placement in the United Nations press gallery and their accreditation. Not many journalists from developing countries were able to travel to the United Nations to cover its activities, but those who managed to do so should be assisted on a priority basis. Expressing support for the Dag Hammarsjköld Memorial Scholarship Fund of the United Nations Correspondents' Association (UNCA), he emphasized that the Department, in addition to extending support to UNCA, might itself provide funding to a greater number of journalists from developing countries to visit the United Nations and cover its activities.

51. **Mr. Win** (Myanmar) said that at a time when the United Nations system had been tarnished in the media, his delegation appreciated the role played by the Department in communicating to the world the process of revitalization and reform in the United Nations, and its strategy to focus on the work of the United Nations in priority areas. Myanmar also noted with satisfaction the Department's initiative of further integrating new information and communication technologies into its global communication infrastructure, which would, in turn, meet the many and varied needs of its clients. There was a pressing need to close the widening digital divide between the developed and developing worlds, as a result of which vast segments of the population in developing countries were not benefiting from the information technology revolution; his delegation urged the Department to play an active role in putting information and communication technologies in the service of development.

52. In order to achieve one of the Millennium Development Goals, Myanmar was taking all possible measures to raise the level of education. The number of universities and colleges had been increased to 156 across the country. Efforts were being made to achieve universal primary education. Myanmar had done its best, within its limited resources, to equip those schools with tools for information technology. There had been a campaign to open libraries at all state, division and township levels. Against that background, the United Nations Information Centre in Yangon was invaluable in disseminating information on United Nations activities to the public at large.

53. The United Nations information centres strengthened the flow of information in the developing countries and provided access to information technology, particularly when there were no alternative means of access to such benefits. Adequate resources should be allocated to ensure the effective functioning of the information centres in developing countries. While recognizing some of the benefits of regionalization and rationalization of the information centres at a time of budgetary constraints, Myanmar strongly requested that rationalization priorities should be determined primarily on the basis of the usefulness of the existing information centre to a given area and the availability of alternative means of access to United Nations information services. His delegation endorsed

the view that any changes made in the context of rationalization should not be to the detriment of the existing information centres worldwide.

54. **Archbishop Migliore** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the Holy See recognized the right to information and its importance in the life of all democratic societies and institutions. The exercise of the freedom of communication should not depend upon wealth, education, or political power. Freedom of expression and the right to information flourished in societies when the fundamental ethics of communication were not compromised, such as the pre-eminence of truth and the good of the individual, respect for human dignity, and promotion of the common good. New technologies had an important role to play in the advancement of the poor, as recipients of information, but also as actors, able to promote their own point of view before the world's decision-makers. In that context, the Holy See had set up a unique continent-wide initiative called the Digital Network of the Church in Latin America (*Red Informática de la Iglesia en América Latina* — RIIAL) which promoted the adoption of digital technologies and programmes in media education, especially in poor areas. The Holy See also supported the continued promotion of the traditional role of libraries and radio in education.

55. Given the ever-increasing ease of access to information of every possible kind, the Holy See stressed the need to protect the most vulnerable, such as children and young people, especially in the light of the increase in content featuring violence, intolerance and pornography. Perhaps the most essential question raised by technological progress was whether, as a result of it, people would grow in dignity, responsibility and openness to others. It was to be hoped that the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society would lead to further concrete efforts to build a more inclusive digital society which would reduce the widespread "info-poverty". The information society should be one endowed with the ability, capacity and skills to generate and capture new information and to access, absorb and effectively use information, data and knowledge. Knowledge was the key to participating in the global economy, of which the Internet was an increasingly important vehicle. At the same time, there was a fundamental need to develop an ability to discern the meaning of information received, given the deluge of information available. That process could flourish only where there was a recognized hierarchy of values.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.